△
811.5
H928w
c.2

UNIVERSITY
OF FLORIDA
LIBRARIES

COLLEGE LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

THE WIND OF TIME

Poetry by Rolfe Humphries

THE WIND OF TIME

FORBID THY RAVENS

THE SUMMER LANDSCAPE

OUT OF THE JEWEL

THE POET IN NEW YORK
(TRANSLATION FROM LORCA)

AND SPAIN SINGS
(WITH M. J. BERNARDETE)

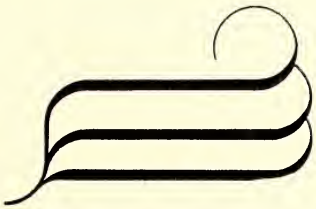
EUROPA, AND OTHER POEMS, AND SONNETS

THE WIND OF TIME

POEMS

by

ROLFE HUMPHRIES



CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, LTD., LONDON
1949

811.5
H92Bw
c.2

Copyright, 1949, by
ROLFE HUMPHRIES

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without the permission of Charles Scribner's Sons
A

The Islands (1947); *The Offering of the Heart, After the Ice-Storm* and *Little Fugue* (1948); *The Cynneddf, Equinox, Arbor Song, The Obdurate,* and *Test Paper* (1949); copyrighted in the respective years by The New Yorker Magazine, Inc. *The Jaded* (1947); *The Late Summer* (1947); *The Pangs* (1948); *Bird Song* (1948); *The Presence* (1949); copyrighted in the respective years by The Nation, Inc. *The Divorce* (1947); copyrighted in that year by "'47," Inc. *Fin de Siècle* (1948); copyrighted in that year by "'48," Inc. *The Statue* (1948); copyrighted in that year by Phi Beta Kappa. *Lullaby* (1948); copyrighted in that year by Harper & Brothers. *Contemporary Artist* (1949); copyrighted in that year by The Saturday Review Associates, Inc.

C-3

Acknowledgments:

The Offering of the Heart, The Islands, Little Fugue, Arbor Song, Equinox, After the Ice-Storm, The Cynneddf, The Obdurate, and *Test-Paper* were first published in THE NEW YORKER, the last poem under the title *Laud for Moderns,* and with a different final stanza.

The Jaded, The Late Summer, The Pangs, Bird Song, The Presence and *Vae Victis* were first published in THE NATION.

The Divorce appeared in "'47" *Fin de Siècle* in "'48:" *Willow Grove, Variation on a Theme by Francis Kilvert,* and *Vade Mecum* were accepted, and paid for, but never published, by that magazine.

The Statue was published by THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

Lullaby was published by HARPER'S MAGAZINE.

Contemporary Artist was published by THE SATURDAY REVIEW OF LITERATURE.

To the editors of these various magazines acknowledgment is made for permission to reprint.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
LYRASIS Members and Sloan Foundation

http://archive.org/details/windoftimepoems00hump

For New Hampshire and Indiana,
with thanks, and love.

—there was music here

CONTENTS

LITTLE FUGUE	1
THE ISLANDS	2
WILLOW GROVE	4
THE JADED	6
THE MANTLE	7
THE STATUE	10
TEST PAPER	12
THE OBDURATE	13
CONTEMPORARY ARTIST	14
THE DIVORCE	16
THE DELIVERANCE	17
FIN DE SIÈCLE	20
OF MICTURITION: A MORALITY	22
VADE MECUM	24
LULLABY	26
VARIATION ON A THEME BY F. KILVERT	27
ARBOR SONG	28
BIRD SONG	29
EXCELLENTLY BRIGHT	30
THE LATE SUMMER	31

EQUINOX 32
VAE VICTIS 33
AFTER THE ICE-STORM 35
THE DISCOVERY 39
THE OFFERING OF THE HEART 40
THE PANGS 42
THE PRESENCE 44
THE CYNNEDDF 46

THE WIND OF TIME

LITTLE FUGUE

Wind running over the reeds like water
Reeds like sea-weed under the wind
Bending and rising, under and over—
So, in the wind of Time, the mind
Seems to bow and recover
Under the run of the river.

Like running water over the reeds
Wind is pouring its weight of air:
The way of Time, like a stream,
With rush and rest proceeds,
A rush, and a rest, and a stir,
And moods are water-weeds.

The bend and the rise, the rest and the rush,
The rush and the reed, and the wind running over,
The weigh and the wait of Time
Under the run of the water
Pouring forever—hush!—
Forever and ever and ever.

The stars, in dissolution burning,
Burn out, as we do, late or soon,
Islands of fire, the fixed, the turning,
Whose morning and whose afternoon
Are half a trillion years, a span
As brief, or long, as his for man.

My son, when dark comes down, comes down
To the south lawn to study these:
Knowing from books the proper noun
For what, to me, are mysteries,
He finds the one he looks for, there,
Above the apple-tree, Altair.

Altair in August. April gone
Four months—or is it only hours?—
Since, resting on the same south lawn,
I lay and looked at yellow flowers
Moving a little when the wind
Came round the corner; and the mind

Stirred, also, idly, wondering
How long the flower had been in bloom,
How many days were left, this spring,
Before its withering and doom;
How long before it had to die
It could not tell. No more could I.

One, two, three, four; infinities,
Or moments? daffodil or man?
It would be best to look at these
O most intensely, while you can,
My trouble said, my wisdom knew,
Who knows? another year or two . . .

But no such worry seems to scare
And no self-conscious panic stir
My summer student of Altair,
Sixteen-year-old astronomer,
Taking it easy; it appears
The stars, and he, have years and years.

One, two, three, four; four, three, two, one,
Less than immortal, burning out,
Father and flower, star and son,
And only one assailed by doubt,
Daffodil, boy, and man, and star,
Most separate, most insular.

Still the dissembling music floats,
Corrupt, deciduous, and gay.
The leaves come down like notes, the notes
Like leaves; the players put away

Their racks and instruments; they hurry,
Faster than usual; the park,
For once, lacks dawdlers; people worry;
The air is prematurely dark.

Dark, and a storm may come. The wind
Lifts for a moment, sweeps the square
Of litter, leaves, and leaflets, thinned
By the low rush of restless air.

While one, reluctant, from his scene
Of triumph, snaps his case, and goes
Down the brief stair, across the green,
Unhappy at the season's close.

But even he, at last, is gone,
By his own sorrow overtaken.
Frail island in a desert lawn,
The ugly kiosk stands, forsaken.

Light, coming quickly under the cloud,
Slants bright, illumining, too late,
A golden shrine behind a crowd
Bent for the outer iron gate,

Nervous, intent, beyond recall,
Gone, now, too far to hear again
The final drops of music fall
With the first single notes of rain.

THE JADED

They have come from far; they have come from very far,
And they are wearier than they are wise.
Their manliness is spent; their cheekbones are
Hollow below their old beleaguered eyes
Which seek, once more, the cities of the plain
With dubious nostalgia, and in vain.

Listening, they have seen confusion darken,
And, watching, they have heard disaster sound;
They do not, any longer, care to hearken
To oracles and prophets, having found
Belief a stimulus which made them strong
For a few moments, never very long.

And now their will is tenuous as smoke
Or veils of mist from vales of mist arising;
Their courage, thin as any beggar's cloak,
Shrinks from advice, and shudders at advising;
Sun is no less endurable than rain;
Both laurels and forget-me-nots are vain.

Gray mountains rise before them, whence they hear
No water, only wind across the rock,
And time, their one attraction, draws them near
To space where time is measured by no clock,
To boundaries beyond the power of song
To stir them, by its brevity, for long.

THE MANTLE

—at Venus obscuro gradientes aere saepsit.

It was no goddess cast that cloud around you,
Dark air where'er you walk, and veils of mist
Lest any sight or sound or touch confound you,
Or question halt you, devious egoist.

Never the golden Cyprian, the mover
Of all that moves along the shores of light
Caused this unreal, untoward pall to cover
The world's external substance, rich and bright.

No: your own little trinity of error,
Self-love, self-praise, and self-deception drew
The triple cloud, to serve alike for mirror,
For shield and sounding-board, to comfort you.

Rapt in that cloud, your sense can not distinguish
Subject from object, can not recognize
The echo of its own disgust or anguish;
Always, it seems, an oracle replies.

Always an oracle, whose inspiration
Confers enlightenment, a silver glow,
A golden rain, a false illumination
Within the shrouded compass where you go

Directionless and limited and stalking
In your own phantom company, a vain
And solitary host, forever walking
The boundaries of that immense terrain,

Your self . . . The sun, hot to its noon ascending,
Burns off the cloud; the shrinking veil is thinned
To wisp of fog, to rag, to nothing, ending
The gray pretense. By afternoon the wind

Blows fresh, revealing what? A sorry figure
Fearful of night, the chill, the misery
Of homelessness, a dissipated beggar
Shambling between the sea-wall and the sea.

Or, in another light, another creature,
A monstrous baby, whom no mother hears
Bawling, its rage distending every feature,
Red in the face, soiled with its dirty tears.

So it was all so useless, that assumption
Of solemn murk, layer on layer, fold
On thickening fold, bestowing no exemption
From hunger, nakedness, exposure, cold.

Better, protected from, not by, the darkness,
If one must wear a cloak, to have it shine
In color like the garment worn by Martin,
Double when halved, redder than blood or wine,

And warm not only with its own astounding
Richness of substance, scarlet thread and weave,
But from its owner's heart, in love abounding.
O my poor mendicant, for once, believe!

Short, husky, black and brown with dust and sweat
The quarry men, whose bar and sledge have pried
The marble loose, stand back to watch it drawn
Down the rough skidroad from the mountainside,

Out of its first exposure, heading toward
A new erosion, where a mind, an eye,
And something called imagination, wait
To wear it down, before the hands dare try

To grasp and lift the chisel and the maul,
One man's complete employment now,—observe
How stone is dressed in nakedness, how steel
With sharp straight edge brings out the bevelled curve.

One man does this, who stops at times, and frowns,
Or hums himself a little tune that goes,
When all goes well, *The more the marble wastes,*
The more it wastes, the more the statue grows.

Finished, at last (he thinks) and sold, and set
In some appropriate spot, a colonnade
Or Syracusan grove, where oranges
Are balls of sun among the globes of shade.

Here, like its owner's fortune, just a trace
Too new for dignity, the statue stands,
Almost a masterpiece, requiring still
Some final touch, the work of other hands.

And these are given; wind and rain and sun,
Time and the weather, infinitely slow,
Patient through generations, waste and wear,
Correct the marble, make the figure grow,

So that tradition, anciency, and grace
Are added by subtraction, and the pure
Symbol from image forms, along whose base
Runs the new rune—*See how our works endure.*

Endure, disintegrate, and, even beyond
Disintegration, live in long renown:
After the vandals come, lop off the limbs,
Hack at the head and helmet, topple down

The mutilated torso, drag it off
Aboard a ship, to cast it in the seas,
Granted its last perfection, men recall
Its glory in one word—Praxiteles.

What do we praise?—Sunsets, and open fires,
America, and mother love, I guess;
The merry laughter of a little child,
And poems that touch the heart with tenderness.

What do we really praise?—Oh, Life and Time,
(With capitals), books that Fadiman commends,
The chromium bars, the streamlined cars and trains,
The music played for music's newest friends.

What do we praise beyond all this?—High art,
God's majesty and sacraments and grace,
The universal music of the spheres,
The mysteries of interstellar space.

Come down to earth. What is it you and I,
My love, deep in our heart of hearts, adore,
Cherish, and tend?—Each other. Not so fast.
Maybe, a little; but ourselves much more.

Last question. (On your honor.) What do all
Praise, absolutely, in this day and age?
Re-read the question; answer thoughtfully;
Write nothing on this portion of the page.

THE OBDURATE

—Whatever you clutch,
It is not much.
Unclench the hand,
Let go the straw,
I say, let go;
Subside, sink down,
Go under, drown.
Let the full tide
More deep than doubt
Flood in, wash out
The scribbled sand.
Abandon pride.
Surrender; cease
To pit the will
Against the word
Oblivion.
Therein alone
Is final peace.
Forget, forget;
Resign; be still.

—Some day, O Lord,
Some day. Not yet.

I am lonely: this, at least, I surely know.
I am important: this I must believe
With neither Church nor State to tell me so.
What can I do but hate, unless I grieve?

Given no myth, no symbol, never drawn
On any great crusade or lofty quest,
My occupation, like Othello's, gone,
My talent uninvited and repressed,

Where can I turn save inward and away
From all the time's corrupting platitudes,
Whose lackeys flatter, whose assassins lay
Their ambuscades in obsolescent woods?

Where can I turn save toward the self, to find
The body and blood, the bread and wine I crave,
The grace of reassurance for the mind,
The absolute injunction to be brave?

Men lie, and things are lied about. I must
Abstract myself from these, and for defense
Against them, put my confidence and trust
In what I have of passion and of sense,

And what I have of craft,—more ways than one
To skin a cat, or keep from telling lies.
One theme recurs, when all is said and done,
Beauty is Truth, in whatsoever guise,

Truth being always, "This is how I feel,"
And never, "This is how it is—rejoice!"
Wie sagt das sich? Gar ohne Zweck und Ziel?
Objectiveless? Not quite. Perhaps by choice,

More likely by determination, I
Given an order, go along with those
Who fight disintegration till they die,
And, without much composure, still compose.

Light, of two elements the unison,
Of air and fire, where one and one are one,
Performs the office of division,

Enacts that earth from water sunder, sever,
Keeping their separate properties forever,
Hill, valley, mountain; ocean, lake, and river.

To each its own identity and sign,
Texture and color, boundary and line,
Motion and rest, the lift, the flow, the shine,

The melody, magnificence and mirth
All more intense, all given brighter worth
By this divorce of water and of earth.

O friends and witnesses, rejoice, approve
The single happiness in which they move;
Give them your fondest blessing, and your love.

What one made two, nothing will render one:
Darkness will overrule my lord the sun,
Darkness, annulment and negation,

The sable reconciler, who remembers
The vain petitions of unending numbers,
Brings them together in his solemn chambers.

So fails the music, falls the screen of marble
Between the world and me, dissolving, broken.
The normal quarrel
Breaks out again, speaks, and is spoken.

Abroad, at home,
I smell corruption under every stone,
Touch the infected, stoop, examine dung,
And taste my own bad breath upon my tongue.

While always at my side
Stalks my official and officious guide,
A vertical nervous brown-and-yellow shadow
Forever at my elbow.

No matter. There's an old red book that tells
How, having mastered seven certain spells,
And met with many perils, one can find
The power within the mind

To transform objects, facing unafraid
The Half-Slim Champion, and the Loathly Lady.
The Dangerous Well, the Triple-Headed Bear
Are not so much to fear.

With time and trouble, pains and patience, learn
The lore of counter-charm. Face East and West,
And North and South, three times. Crush vervain. Burn
Hazel and rowan. Test

The wind's direction. Gather in the night
St. John's Wort, and All-heal.
Reach in a brook till thumb and fingers feel
A pair of perfect pebbles, round and white.

Strip yourself mother-naked; bathe in milk.
Summon a princess-royal, who will throw
Her arms around you, open her gown of silk,
And give you her green mantle when you go.

Practice at being lion, red-hot bar
Of iron, adder, esk. And then there are,
Of course, more than a few
Other and necessary things to do.

Still, if a man is brave enough and wise
To swear himself his destiny, he can
Be something more than man,
Transform himself as well as objects, rise

To be an eagle, or the blade of a sword,
A drop in the air, a boat at sea, a word
In an illumined book, a bridge, the foam
Of the wave, or the string of a harp, and come

So, through his nine fulfillments, to a grove
Where charming people, with delightful words,
Converse, and rest, and move
Among the blue and yellow flowers and scarlet birds,

To hear, once more, the music, hear once more
The music, find the screen no longer screen,
And all reality more bright, more clean,
Than ever it was, or could have been, before.

All that I wander through, so bright, so modern,
So quick with novelty, so very wise,
So *dernier cri,* so *ne plus ultra,* this,
All this, all this, I come to realize,
All of a sudden, is not mine at all,
Is not my Now, but some one else's Then.
There will be other women, other men,
Appropriating this, still bright, but small,
Garish and glazed, of colored post-card size,
So little that it goes from hand to hand
For the delight of those who know and praise
Our customs, our *décor* and these our days:
"How irresistible! How charming!" so
Runs their gay comment on their long ago.
Secure, and, what is even better, *chic,*
These lovers of the chromium antique
Will pride themselves because they understand.

Forgive their trespasses. If we resent
Being considered quaint and innocent,
Remember—they will know, beyond a doubt,
How all the things that frightened us came out,
And, for their own anxieties, will cast
The light of certainty around the past,

Impute to others what they dare not claim,
The opposite of sorrow, guilt, and shame,
And even when most dubious will know
One more advantage, which might possibly
Conduce to smugness. They will surely be,
Past any contradiction, still alive
In Nineteen ninety three, and four, and five.

OF MICTURITION: A MORALITY

—from Daniel George's *Anatomy of Woe.*

Dr. T. Goodwin
Around 1680
Was somewhat inclined
To whymsicall moments.
Once, in a frolick,
He pist in the pocket
Of old Mr. Lothian—
How, never mind.

And a man from Siena
Wouldn't pass water,
Afraid he would drown,
So he said, the whole town;
So they sent for physitians,
Rang the bells backward,
And they all shouted "Fire!"
This effected a cure.

The moral, if any,
Would seem to be this:
It is better to piss,
Or do anything else,
In a light-hearted way
Than to summon the solemn
And ring all the bells
And turn the town frantic:

—Sing High-ho, the antic;
Heigh-ho, the gay.

VADE MECUM

One evil action every day
Will keep psychiatrists away.
Deliberate misconduct, planned
With proper prudence, understand,
Is what it takes to do the trick
And keep the soul from getting sick.
Tenants, no more, of Paradise,
What are we,—angels, men, or mice?
Knowing the facts of life, the sin
Adherent from our origin,
Better to face our nature, sure
We can not be completely pure,
Better to cultivate our garden
Than bend the knee and sue for pardon.
This side of Hell, the apple tree
Affords convenient therapy.
Don't bite off more than you can chew,
But give Beelzebub his due.
I am no advocate, of course.
Of statutory rape, or worse,
Barratry, bigamy, or arson,
Or beating up the nearest parson,
Embracery, or fraud, or theft,
Or driving madly on the left:

No, no; no need to go so far,
Being the creatures that we are,
Any man's heart suggests at once
A million million nasty stunts
On which his turpitude can draw
Within the letter of the law.
Give up the effort, vain and wrong,
Of being noble, all day long,
Of straining, in a hopeless tussle,
Your every moral nerve and muscle.
Relax; and once a day, at least,
Contrive to be a perfect beast,
Free, uninhibited, untamed,
Unscrupulous, and unashamed,
In short, a normal man or woman,
Instead of something superhuman.
So, when the evening prayer is said,
The light turned out, and you in bed,
A healthy conscience, all night through,
Will sleep the clock around with you.

LULLABY

Somber, for thy slumber's use,
Somber and fuliginous
Be thy quilt and pillow. Quiet.
Close the eyes to all that white
Harsh, insistent, burning, mordant
Acrimony of the sun.
Nebulous oblivion
Be thy music, undiscordant,
Be thy mute obedient servant.
Let the debt survive the dun;
Never mind; go under so,
While in circles, round and round,
Wheel the silenced arcs of sound,
Moving, in their grooveless ways,
Through the antidote of days,
Infinitely smooth and slow.

VARIATION ON A THEME BY FRANCIS KILVERT

The Welsh harp has no silver string,
And it is played on the left shoulder.
And the harpers all are older
Than the counsellors of the king.

And they are becoming rare,
Those gray and bearded men
With young hands and long fingers,

But every here and there,
By glade or coombe or glen,
One of them lingers

Remote from all known ways
Save those that music clears
Through ash and sycamore
To the door of their dwelling.

Whenever one of them plays,
Whoever hears him hears
Most beautiful old airs.

They are poor of purse; they rise
May mornings, very early,
And tradesmen think they are surly
In spite of the wrinkled eyes
Scored by their years of smiling.

ARBOR SONG

The vine on the trellis
Weaves under and over,
Under and over, weaves,
Over and under—
To the constant frame the ever inconstant wonder,
Looseness of leaves
And cling of the tendril twining,
O intricate! O rare!
Even space, even air,
Part of the order and becomingness,
Blossom as grace-note, all,
Whether moving or still,
So perfectly designed
That the sight is the sound,
No more and no less,
Beautiful, musical.

BIRD SONG

Under green
I have seen
A girl below a linden tree

Chicory
Tall as she
All along a summer lane

Color clear
Quick and pure
And a silver-age refrain

Vidi
Viridi
Phyllida sub tilia.

Quicker than hazel wand
The moon discovers water
Lifts it from underground
Running or still
To stir in the light wind
All quicksilver.

All that brightness
Loosed from the hold
Of ground and of shadow
Lovers and angels praise,
Silver and running gold,
Holy, holy, holy.

Everything still, oh, absolutely still.
Who would have thought Pomona was like this,
So almost like Medusa? But she is.
No breath whatever stirs
This warm domain of hers.

Under the drooping willows, whose festoons
Hang down like chains of green and heavy stones
Two lovers stand, holding each other close.
They neither move nor whisper; and their pose,
The taller one unbending for the kiss,
Is like the deaf, the rigid, like all those
Most hopeless listeners
Locked, shut, held fast, in nothing.

By the cove
The great log with the broken antler lies
Heavy and huge and gray,
An old, old ram, or mountain sheep, who came
To drink, and failed, the water being steel.

Oh, goddess, goddess, need it be this way?
Break, lift, the trance, the spell. Let the wind rise,
Let branches, in the bright September, move,
And garments flutter, as the singing girls
Take home the harvest in the cool of love.

EQUINOX

Daylight or darkness, what you hear
Along about this time of year
Is, mostly, vague and feverish whir,

September's nervous idiom—
Brief rest, reiterated hum:
Little enough is left of summer.

Cicadas, katydids keep on;
The blades revolve across the lawn
For the last time, or last but one.

The knives are duller, but the sense,
Sharpened by an intransigence,
Insistent rather than intense,

Feels heat subside to warmth, and light
Draw in before its opposite,
Feels terror in the temperate.

VAE VICTIS

The Romans have invaded us again,—
That decadent nation, with the melancholy
Under the ostentation and the bronze,
Misgivers, dressed in attitudes of scorn,
Corrupted by their own imposing folly,
The bands and banners, cruelty and games,
Victorious over green batallions,
Summer's luxurious easy army slain.

They line our highways, confiscate our corn,
Possess our fields and set our woods in flames.
Each year they come, each year they flash and shine,
Proud in imperial purple, orange, gold,
Maroon, magenta, madder, carmine, wine,
Vermilion, umber; arrogant and bold.

Each year, some morning finds them driven forth
In panic by a rumor from the north,
Their camps forsaken, flying for their lives
Before the keen barbarians, armed with knives,
The fierce and terrible Scythians, whose breath
Sets in the crimson vein the blue of death.

Alarm, alarm! The fires burn black by dawn,
The wavering legions vanish and are gone,
Leaving no monument, no trace to mark
The mutinous disorder in the dark
Except the hue of blood, the deep red stain
Where some courageous officer was slain,
Or, it may be, a cloak of scarlet, found
Under a maple, on the frozen ground.

AFTER THE ICE-STORM

After the ice-storm, bundled in coat and muffler,
And putting my feet down cautiously and slow,
I turned aside for a broken branch of poplar
Fallen across the snow.

Out in the street, where the branch was twig, I noticed
Something I had to stop for, look at twice,
A long green bud, enlarged in brittle crystal,
Encased and sheathed in ice.

Of course I knew the buds were there in winter,
But my poor observation had not seen
When I looked up at them on other mornings
How far along, how green,

How almost leaf they were, in February!
I broke the twig, and held it in my glove,
Rebuke to carelessness, to study closer,
To learn from, and to love,

To feel the least bit sentimental over,
Knowing that now it could not ever be
Fulfilled, in April, in the way of nature,
High on the poplar tree.

Too bad; but still, except for this disaster,
The single bud, so dear, so precious now,
Would have been lost with all the host of others
Above me on the bough.

Well: there was nothing I could do about it,
Except remember it, if so inclined.
I let it drop, went on where I was going,
Dismissed it from my mind.

Or did I? Frozen bud, and promise broken,
And green caught fast in ice, are, it would seem,
Matters not so conveniently forgotten.
I dreamed, and in the dream

There was warm weather, sun on land and water,
I wore my summer clothes, my arms were brown,
And I was in a boat, and going slowly
And idly looking down

Through glass, through green, through emerald
translucence,
And far below, deep as a tree is high,
I saw the shoots of life, a shoal of fishes,
Little as buds, go by.

Little as buds, and shaped like buds, but orange,
Golden; not green, not ice-locked; darting bright,
Flashes of fire, whose element was water,
Almost too swift for sight.

My boat moved on, drawn by no sail, no rower.
What was I over now? A great white stone
Huge as a sunken iceberg, shapeless, looming
Fathoms below the known.

Not ice, not stone, not shapeless, but a goddess,
Most grave, most noble, dweller in the seas,
Majestic in her robes of marble, holding
A zither on her knees.

And there was music coming from the ocean,
Benevolent, melodious, profound,
And I heard all that lay below the surface
In that Aeolian sound.

Remember, oh remember, said the music
To wind and air and water-weed and wave,
And to my heart, *Remember, oh remember*
The vows that summer gave.

And will renew, I knew, of early morning,
Of poplar branches trembling in the night,
Fragrance, and warmth; a girl, and mirth, and gardens,
All marvel, all delight.

My boat had grounded on the shoals of waking,
And I, through whipping sedge and driving sand,
Trudged, when I did not stumble, toward the barren,
The gray, the frozen land,

Willing to face, but not entirely willing
The ordinary moments of the day;
Farewell, I kept on saying to the music,
And woke, and it was May.

"A unicorn!" they cried, "A unicorn!"
And all came running. Noble and austere,
He took their stare, their curious gaze, and morning
Ran through their veins like cooler fire, like air
All green with earliness. No purer white
Ever in any snow by moonlight shone,
An absolute and incandescent brightness
From hoof to horn. A thousand flowers were fire
Around him where he halted, flesh and bone,
Survivor of the cast of any spear.

Forsaking all the ardor of the hunt,
They were content with watching him. He stood
Below the red and golden fruit, confronting
Their stir, their daze, with majesty. The shade
Was light, subdued, and there was music here
Like bloom, or light, or running stream of sound
Moving the darker leaves beyond the clearing.
Mild as the air they breathed, their quietude
Reflecting his, benign, at ease, they found
Themselves, and they were happy. This was good.

Tapestry from Arras, XV Century

Against a somber background, blue as midnight,
More blank and dark than cloud, as black as storm,
The almost moving leaves are almost golden,
The light is almost warm.

Seated, a lady, wearing a cloak with ermine
Holds on her hand, correctly gloved and bent,
A falcon, without feathered hood or jesses;
Her gaze appears intent

On what her hound, good little dog, is doing
Around her ankles, left front paw in air,
Regardless of the three white careless rabbits—
He does not see them there,

Or turn, as does the falcon, toward the gallant,
The gentleman, more elegant than smart,
Who comes, in crimson cloak with ermine lining,
And offers her a heart,

Holding it, chastely, between thumb and finger
Whose U it does not fill, a plum in size,
A somewhat faded strawberry in color—
She does not raise her eyes.

How can a heart be beating in the bosom,
And yet held up, so tiny, in the hand?
Innocence; mystery: an Age of Science
Would hardly understand.

—atque ea nimirum quaecumque Acheronte profundo prodita sunt esse, in vita sunt omnia nobis.

The stone of Sisyphus
Explodes into design;
The water, through the sieve,
Descends in purest line;
And who would think that birds
As huge, as gaunt, as these,
Could open beaks to sing
Such lovely melodies?

The thirst, the hunger, take
Sustenance from the sight
Of water, out of reach,
And apples, red and bright;
The wheel's revolving hum
Diminishes; unbound,
A happy giant strides
Across the springy ground.

All that we thought was Hell,
And we therein, forsooth,
Proves, as Lucretius showed,
The converse of the truth:
Hell was in us, not we
In Hell; we made it so,
Guilty self-punishers,
Who bade the cancer grow.

All nonsense: cut it out,
The wound heals over; see
Water and wheel and rock
And fruit and bird and tree
All separate, all met,
Dear love, dear world, in one
Recovered image, bright
And glorious with sun.

THE PRESENCE

—esse est percipi, aut percipere.

Under the unexisting trees, the unexisting
Drift, waver, vague as water, to and fro;
Mist under mist, and shadow under shadow,
Unoccupied, they go.

They do not see the trees, which, therefore, are not,—
Dissolved, abolished, melted into air,
The trunk, the bark, the branch, the leaf, the swaying,
So there is nothing there.

Nothing, and no one. For the unperceiving,
All those who move about and never see,
If we believe more than a part of Berkeley,
Can not be said to be.

The trees are safe, however. Wait, and hearken!
Perceivers are approaching, in whose tread
Comes quickness out of dark, music from shadow,
A stirring overhead,

Light almost audible, and color proving,
Past all denial, what our instinct knew,
An absolute, immune to disillusion,
The physical is true.

And even were there no one there to see it,
There would be One, a grace, a consciousness,
The seer, unseen, who comprehends, completely,
Who says, forever, *Yes*.

After a banquet
Powyll of Dyfed
With many attending
Strolled to a hillock
Back of the palace.

"Lord," said a courtier,
"Here is a strangeness:
If you sit on this mound
One of two things
Will certainly happen
Before you depart,
The hurt of a wound,
Or the sight of a wonder."

"I fear no wound,"
Said Powyll of Dyfed,
"With this host all around me,
And as for a wonder,
Gladly I'd see one,
For wonders were ever
Dear to my heart."

He sat on the mound,
And a lady came riding,
Lovely to look at
In garments of gold
On a cream-colored stallion.
She rode very slowly,
She sang sweet and low,
And no one there knew her.

Powyll of Dyfed
Followed on foot
And could not overtake her,
And sent for the sorrel,
Most fleet of his stable,
Mounted and rode
By cairn and by cromlech.

Salmon and eagle,
The owl and the ousel,
From rock and from river,
From water, from air,
Watched the pursuit,
Pursued and pursuer.

Weary of riding,
Powyll of Dyfed
Cried in despair
To the beautiful lady,
"Stay, in the name
Of the one you love best!"
She reined in, smiling,
Turned to him, told him,
"Had you said so the sooner,
You would have spared
Your spirited sorrel
A great deal of anguish,"
And she took off her veil.

Of all of the maidens
And all of the women
He ever had seen
This was the fairest.
Powyll of Dyfed
Came to her side,

Said to her, "Lady,
Receive my greeting,
And what is your journey?"
—"I go my own errand
In my own manner."
—"Oh, what is your quest?"
—"You," she replied.

It would be a big lie
To say they were happy
For ever and ever:
Boredom, depression,
Sometimes would settle
Even in Narberth,
And now and again
The hurt of a wound
That time could not always
Stifle or soften:
But every so often,
And over and over,
They would see from the mound
A wonder go by.

COLLEGE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
C-3

Date Due

C-3

NOV 4 '52	OCT 8 '52		
DEC 4 '52	DEC 1 2 '52		
OCT 5 '54	OCT 22 '54		
JAN 4 '56	DEC 16 '56		
JUL 1 9 1958	JUL 23 1958		
DEC 8 1958	NOV 26 1958		

811.5
H928w
c.2

Withdrawn from UF. Surveyed to Internet Archive

C-3

The wind of time, poems. main
811.5H928w C.2

3 1262 03449 8062